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Some operations won't be forgotten

During the continual upgrading of the Camas mill, several departments, programs and traditions have fallen by the wayside.

Among them: The hotel, Paper School, tramway, bag factory and groundwood mill.

And don't forget the beautiful red roses that once flourished on the mill grounds; the uniforms once required of women employees; or the wicker lunch baskets that are gradually being replaced by insulated six-pack carriers.

Only one tradition has held its ground the past 100 years, and that's the mill whistle. As far back as

reminders that the paper mill is an integral part of the Camas community.

Monday through Saturday, it lets off steam at 6:45 a.m. (twice), 8 a.m., noon, 1 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Many a person has caught a few extra winks when the operator forgot to blow the whistle.

But what about those activities that have not endured the march of progress?

The Hotel

On the site where early Camas families had enjoyed picnic lunches, the Crown-Willamette Hotel was built in 1918.

The Oct. 1918 issue of *Making Paper* described the grand opening this way: "The new structure was thrown open to the public, and the people of Camas responded en masse and passed a favorable judgment on this new and handsome institution which the company has built and dedicated to its bachelor employees.

The hotel cost \$100,000 and featured "hot and cold water in every room" and was "equipped with every means for comfort and sanitation employed in the finest hotels in the country."

In 1956, a two-year modernization and renovation

project was completed on the building, then called the Crown Zellerbach Hotel.

The project included additional banquet seating, which brought the total seating capacity up to 420.

The newly remodelled west banquet room was paneled with Douglas fir and the upholstery, linens and napkins were coordinated in a shade of melon.

Howard Martin, now Camas postmaster, served as the hotel's manager from about 1952 until 1960.

He remembers the hotel as being "the center of the social life in Camas." Hobby clubs, toastmasters and

always alive with wedding receptions, banquets and other get-togethers.

He also remembers the meetings J.D. Zellerbach held at the hotel, with Martin's daughters perched on each knee.

"When Sputnik went up in the '50s, everyone hung out the windows and fire escapes trying to get a good look at the first Russian satellite," said Martin.

He also recalls the regular Wednesday night poker games held by "The Jolly Boys," a group of mill supervisors and local merchants. Later, the poker room was remodelled and turned over to the Chamber of Commerce.

The hotel, which later became outdated for its lack of an elevator, bar and other modern conveniences, closed about 10 years ago. The Riverview Savings Association now occupies the lot.

Paper school

In 1933, Crown Zellerbach formed a college for employees, called the Camas Paper School. It was a four-year program, that until its closure in the late '70s, graduated several thousand students.

School "terms" began in the latter part of October and ran through the latter part of February. Students

who completed the entire four-year curriculum were given a thorough knowledge of all phases of pulp and paper manufacturing. (Later, the school was granted accreditation by the University of Washington College of Forestry.)

Mill superintendents and supervisors formed the faculty for the school.

Tramway

Over a 99 year period, the Camas tramway evolved from a system pulled by mules, to one powered by electric motors and overhead trolley cables. In 1982, the tramway was replaced

In 1883, when the Columbia River Paper Co. began building a paper mill at La Camas, mules pulled tram cars from the sawmill near Lackamas Lake to the hill by the school. From there, according to one account, "They raced by gravity to

the mill. The mules were led down the hill to pull the empty cars back up."

In 1913, electric motors were added to the system.

The tramway ran on track set 36 inches apart, while standard railroads run on 56-inch track.

The tram engines were designed for use in mining. To adapt them for use at Camas, the maintenance department added cabs, installed electric motors and beefed up their weight.

When the system was removed in 1982, the tram operated with four locomotives, nearly 100 cars and seven miles of track.

The track ran from the ex-shack by the river. Points in between included virtually every part of the mill.

The "nerve center" for the system was the dispatcher's office, where the sequence for pickups and deliveries was decided.

The tram was operated

by two people — a motorman and a brakeman. The motorman controlled the speed (about 5 miles per hour) and guided the train into forward or reverse.

The brakeman rode on the outside and hooked and unhooked cars and handled the brakes.

Until the advent of two-way radio some years ago, the brakeman and motorman communicated by whistle.

After its removal from the mill, much of the tramway equipment was donated to local museums, including the Sumpter Valley Railroad in Oregon; the National Railway Historical

Society.

Bag factory

Bag-making at Camas mill began in 1906, when the then 40-year-old Bay City plant was moved to Washington "to be nearer the supply of raw materials."

The first plant was located in a building now occupied by Nos. 1 and 2 paper machines.

In 1916, No. 2 warehouse was converted into a two-story building and, for the first time, the bag factory became a distinct unit.

Ten years later, the bag factory moved into a new concrete building, where it remained until its closure on May 29, 1981.

In 1929, there were about 80 bag machines producing 6-7 million bags per day.

In 1978, there were 45 machines and 225 people producing 15 million bags a day. At that time, the Camas bag factory was the largest specialty bag plant west of the Mississippi River.

When the operation closed, there were 41 machines and 100 people.

During its 75-year existence, the bag factory produced more than 1,700 different kinds of bags, from little one-ounce bags to large multi-wall cement bags, made of heavy kraft paper.



At one time, the bag factory made 1,700 kinds of bags.